Choosing the Report Structure

The most common report structures are presented below.

Report Structure	Should be used when...
1. Direct: Starts with the conclusion or recommendation, and then supports it with data.	The reader expects the conclusion or recommendation and is receptive to it.
2. Indirect: Provides specific facts and analysis of these facts, leading up to a conclusion or recommendation.	The reader may not be receptive to the conclusion, and needs to be convinced; OR, he/she requires background details before being able to understand the message. This approach is often used for conveying bad news.
3. Chronological: Uses time order as the central organization component.	The information is better understood when organized around time. This structure is useful for documenting trips or incidents.
4. Problem/Solution: Presents a problem, followed by a proposed solution.	The problem and proposed solution can be stated concisely, and are likely to receive little objection.
5. Cause/Effect: Identifies and discusses the causes of a problem, and the predicted outcomes (effect).	You need to report your perception of a direct relationship between two or more events; for instance, you could use this format to explain or predict the effect of new policies.
6. Spatial: Presents data logically in terms of geographical units.	You need to present data analysis, conclusions, or recommendations for various geographical locations (such as international subsidiaries).
7. Topical: Organizes information around major topics of discussion, for example: Findings, Conclusions, Recommendations. Topic headlines should be identified.	The reader needs to analyze information on many aspects of the problem; the information is too complex to be presented all at once.
8. Compare/Contrast: Examines two or more items in terms of common criteria, in order to discover similarities and differences.	A choice must be made between two alternatives.

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Skill Practice - Choosing the Report Structure

For each of the examples below, determine which report structure was used.

> *Few reports adhere to a single structure. You may choose to combine several of the structures above to better suit your purpose, content, context, or audience.*

1. _6_____

  As you requested, I have analyzed customer-assistance calls, complaints about customer assistance, and potential needs for customer assistance in our market area. Based on that analysis, I recommend the following changes in service personnel:

Central City: Add one service consultant.
Northeast: Add two service consultants and one technician.
Northwest: Add two service technicians.
Southwest: Reassign one technician to the Southeast district.
Southeast: Assign one technician from the Southwest district and add one service consultant.

2. _5_____

  Three months ago, we upgraded the PCs in the claims department and authorized claims examiners to approve a broader range of claims. Each examiner received 10 hours of training for their new computers and new responsibilities.
  With no increase in personnel, monthly output in the claims department is now 10 percent above what it had been before these changes. Upgrading the computers and retraining our claims processors increased productivity in the claims department.

3. _3_____

Please find below my report on the Human Resource Annual Conference, which I attended from January 21-23.

January 21: Conference discussions centered on training and evaluation of training. I had a very productive meeting with J. Smith, from People First; we discussed possible international training exchanges in 2001.

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January 22: I attended a workshop on performance evaluation and feedback coaching for employees. I managed to discover some tools we have not used previously, and plan to implement them in the coming months.

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4. _____ Ħ _____

Recently, our department has experienced several production delays because of inefficient service from Computer Services. For example, on May 15, an important project was delayed because a technician did not run all tests after installing a new memory chip.

I propose that we request a meeting with the Director of Computer Services. At that meeting, we should provide evidence of CS inefficiencies that have impaired our productivity. We will assure the director that we will support her efforts to obtain and train additional staff, but let's also insist that she provide plans to improve services to our departments.

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5. _____

In answer to your request, I have evaluated the Report Writing courses provided by People First and Best Training. Best Training's prices tend to be somewhat higher, but its services include pre-training assessment and follow-up evaluations. However, an informal survey of HR managers in other companies indicate that People First has better facilities, and usually yields better performance results. I would therefore recommend that we go with People First.

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6. _____

Here is my report on measures of operating success in the past year:

Sales
Sales have increased by 20% over the past year, creating a revenue increase of LE 5 million. We forecast the same increase for the coming year. With the planned price adjustments, revenues should climb by LE 7 million in the next year.

Profits
Increases in costs, especially in the customer care area, and the upgrading of our technology have eaten away at our profit margin. Despite a significant increase in sales, our profits are down by LE 3 million. However, we forecast a LE 2 million profit increase next year.

Turnover

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We have managed to reduce the employee turnover rate from 22% to 10%. This is due to added sales incentives, the introduction of added health benefits, and the restructuring of our training unit.

Performance evaluations
Overall, employee performance is on the rise, with 80% of our employees obtaining "above-average" to "good" performance ratings from their managers.

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7. _____

I have followed up on your request to evaluate our partnership with World Wing.

As you know, several commercial airlines announced reductions in their frequent traveler programs last year. Fortunately, World Wings values its partnership with us, and wishes to maintain current rewards levels with our company.

Spiraling costs, however, are forcing them to curtail less frequently used portions of the program. Beginning in 2001, we will no longer have access to mileage credits for car rentals and for flights on other carriers.

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8. _____

I have followed up on your request to evaluate our partnership with World Wing.

World Wing has agreed to increase its reward program for our staff at all levels. We can thus expect bonuses of 500 air miles per flight, as well as unlimited access to car rentals and hotel accommodations using World Wing miles.

They have expressed that given the amount of business we bring them yearly, they wish to maintain their relationship with us, despite severe cutbacks in the industry.